SPORT

Endrick, Abner help Lyon climb to fourth in Ligue 1

PARIS: In-form Brazilian Abner Vinicius scored what proved to be the winner as Olympique Lyonnais moved into the Ligue 1 top four with a 2-1 victory over 10-man Brest on Sunday.

Lyon took advantage of Lille's loss at Paris St-Germain on Friday to jump above the northerners in the table.

Paulo Fonseca's men are two points behind third-placed Marseille, but 10 adrift of surprise leaders RC Lens, who are one point clear of champions PSG.

"The team's goal is always to win. There are still great things to play for," said forward Endrick, on loan at Lyon from Real Madrid. "What I want is for us to share something beautiful this season."

Brest forward Romain Del Castillo was sent off in the 19th minute for a nasty foul on Nicolas Tagliafico.

Lyon had to wait until four minutes before half-time to take advantage, when Pavel Sulc produced a brilliant finish from a tight angle after rounding visiting goalkeeper Gregoire Coudert.

Abner doubled the lead in first-half added time with a thunderous strike from just outside the area after being teed up by compatriot Endrick, making his league debut after scoring in his first game for the club last weekend in the French Cup.

Brest pulled one back late on through Junior Dina Ebimbe, but Lyon held on.

"I'm a player who always wants to score, but if I don't score, I want to help the team defensively or provide an assist," Endrick added.

"That's what I did for Abner, who scored a magnificent goal. Helping the team is what motivates me."

Earlier, Paris FC eased their relegation worries as substitute Luca Koleosho's winner secured a crucial 2-1 victory at fellow strugglers Nantes.

The capital club climbed to 13th place, five points clear of Nantes who occupy the relegation play-off spot.

Gary O'Neil enjoyed a 2-1 win over Metz in his first league game as Strasbourg coach, while sixth-placed Rennes were held to a 1-1 draw by Le Havre.—AFP

RABAT: Senegal players celebrate with the trophy after winning the Africa Cup of Nations final against Morocco at the Prince Moulay Abdellah Stadium.—AFP

Blow for Africa Cup of Nations after farcical final

RABAT: African football would have been hoping for a thrilling end to a slick and competitive Cup of Nations tournament but will wake up on Monday with a major headache after the final between Senegal and hosts Morocco descended into farce.

Senegal, who won 1-0 after extra time, staged a walk-out after they had a penalty awarded against them deep in stoppage time at the end of the match.

They were ordered off the field by their coach Pape Bouna Thiaw, with some players going back to the dressing room, and it was only after Sadio Mane cajoled them back that the game continued.

"What did we say to each other? That's between us. We did it together and we came back together, that's all that matters," said goalkeeper Edouard Mendy, one of those involved in ugly scenes of jostling and arguing between the players.

A 14-minute delay between the awarding of the penalty, after a lengthy VAR review, and the taking of the kick was followed by a tame effort from Morocco's Brahim Diaz, who had been their star performer as they reached the final for the first time in 22 years.

His Panenka-style chipped effort floated into Mendy's arms, leaving the game goalless and having to go into extra time.

"He attempted the Panenka, but I stayed on my feet. We kept the team in the game, and I helped my team at that moment," Mendy added.

The penalty was awarded following a VAR check by Congolese referee Jean-Jacques Ndala after Brahim Diaz had been tugged to the ground by Senegal full back El Hadji Malick Diouf while defending a corner five minutes into stoppage time.

Morocco coach Walid Regragui said the delay did not help Diaz.

"But that doesn't excuse Brahim for the way he hit the penalty. He hit it like that and we have to accept it. We were one minute from being African champions. That's football. It's often cruel. We missed what for some was the opportunity of a lifetime," he said.

SUPERB WINNING GOAL

Pape Gueye won the trophy for Senegal with a superb strike four minutes into extra time, stunning the vast majority of the 66,526 fans at the Prince Moulay Abdellah Stadium and handing his country their second trophy in the last three editions and extending Morocco's poor record in the tournament which they have won once previously 50 years ago.

But Senegal's success will be overshadowed by the controversy of the walk-off, blemishing the image of the African game which only days earlier had boasted of record worldwide revenue for its showpiece tournaments as interest spread worldwide.

Guey said his team had walked off due to a "feeling of injustice" with Senegal already furious at having a goal disallowed for a soft-looking foul minutes earlier.

"Just before the penalty we thought we should have had a goal and the referee didn't go to VAR," said Gueye. "Sadio told us to come back on and we re-mobilised."

However, Morocco coach Walid Regragui was worried by the damage done globally to African football by the chaotic final.

"The image we've given of Africa is shameful," added Regragui. "A coach who asks his players to leave the field. What Pape did does not honour Africa. He wasn't classy. But he is a champion, so he can say whatever he wants."

His Senegal counterpart, Thiaw, could face sanctions for his actions. However, he missed the chance to discuss the controversy when his post-match press conference was called off after he was jeered by Moroccan journalists when he entered the room while their Senegalese counterparts applauded him.

Thiaw admitted to broadcaster beIN Sports that he had erred in telling the players to walk off.

"After thinking about it, I realised that I shouldn't have asked them to go off. I apologise for that," said Thiaw. "Sometimes you can react in the heat of the moment. Before that we scored a goal that was not given. But now we accept that referees do make mistakes and we apologise."

'UNACCEPTABLE SCENES'

FIFA president Gianni Infantino, meanwhile, condemned "some Senegal players" for the "unacceptable scenes".

"We strongly condemn the behaviour of some 'supporters' as well as some Senegalese players and technical staff members," Infantino said in a statement.

"It is unacceptable to leave the field of play in this manner, and equally, violence cannot be tolerated in our sport, it is simply not right."

African football's governing body CAF did not allocate blame but said they would take "appropriate action" against those "found guilty".

Infantino's statement appeared to be designed to avoid criticising Senegal's former Liverpool star Mane, who urged his teammates to return to the game for the penalty.

Infantino, who was seen talking to Mane during the trophy presentation, said teams have to abide by the match officials' decisions.

"We must always respect the decisions taken by the match officials on and off the field of play... because anything less puts the very essence of football at risk."

Infantino, who will be hoping there are no such scenes in this year's World Cup finals in the United States, Canada and Mexico, said Sunday's events sent the wrong message to supporters round the world.

"It is also the responsibility of teams and players to act responsibly and set the right example for fans in the stadiums and millions watching around the world," he said.

"The ugly scenes witnessed today must be condemned and never repeated... and I expect that the relevant disciplinary bodies at CAF will take the appropriate measures."—Agencies

Sociedad stun Barca to end leaders' winning streak

SAN SEBASTIAN: Real Sociedad earned a pulsating 2-1 home victory over La Liga leaders Barcelona on Sunday, ending the Catalans' 11-match winning streak in all competitions.

The thrilling encounter in a rain-soaked San Sebastian saw Sociedad withstand relentless pressure as Barcelona struck the woodwork five times in the second half.

Mikel Oyarzabal opened the scoring with a volley in the 32nd minute, but Barca equalised with a Marcus Rashford header from close range in the 70th.

However, a minute later, Goncalo Guedes sealed the victory for the home side with another volley from inside the box.

Sociedad were reduced to 10 men in the final minutes after Carlos Soler was given a straight red card for a reckless sliding tackle on Pedri.

Despite the defeat, Hansi Flick's Barcelona remain top of the standings on 49 points, one point ahead of second-placed Real Madrid. Villarreal and Atletico Madrid trail far behind with both on 41 points.

"I think we deserved to win, we had lots of chances," Barca captain Frenkie de Jong told DAZN. "At the end of the day, you have to score with the opportunities you create. We played very well, but their keeper, [Alex] Remiro had a great game."

Remiro showed great reflexes, when he kept a venomous strike from distance by Olmo in the 37th minute and denied Ferran Torres from close range early in the second half.

Remiro again displayed his heroics as he thwarted Robert Lewandowski's header from point-blank, deflecting it just enough to keep it out before it hit the post.

"Three great points and a great game," said Remiro. "We've started this year in great form... this is the energy we have, how we've changed [recently]."

La Real coach Pellegrino Matarazzo hailed his team's "heart", but admitted that his side had some fortune and was grateful for Remiro's saves.

"A quality goalkeeper is not luck, so it's a mix," he said.La Real were also a bit fortunate as before Lewandowski, Spaniard Olmo also struck the post twice in the second half.

Barcelona came agonisingly close to level matters but Rashford's curling corner in added time clipped the near post.

Barca midfielder de Jong complained about referee Jesus Gil Manzano, calling him arrogant. The Catalunyan coach Flick agreed with de Jong's assessment.

SAN SEBASTIAN: Real Sociedad's Mikel Oyarzabal scores past Barcelona goalkeeper Joan Garcia during their La Liga match at the Reale Arena.—Reuters

"I don't want to waste energy on him," said Flick, referring to Manzano. "Frenkie is right."

Earlier on Sunday, Celta Vigo routed 10-man Rayo Vallecano 3-0 at home. The visitors played with 10 men from the 66th after Nobel Mendy was sent off for a hard foul after VAR review.

It was the third win in a row for Celta, who are seventh. Rayo are 13th.—Agencies

Everton's Thierno Barry puts dent in Villa's title hopes

BIRMINGHAM: Thierno Barry scored a second-half winner as Everton ended title-chasing Aston Villa's 11-game home winning run with a 1-0 Premier League victory at a wet Villa Park on Sunday, a result that will be celebrated in North London.

Villa stay in third place in the table on 43 points from 22 games, seven points behind leaders Arsenal, who now have a sizeable lead in the title race. Everton climb to 10th place on 32 points.

The visitors took the lead on 59 minutes when Pau Torress poor touch was collected by Dwight McNeil and when the latter's shot was parried by Emiliano Martinez in the home goal, Barry followed up to chip the ball into the net.

"We created chances, we didn't score," Villa manager Unai Emery said. "They had fewer chances than us and scored. They competed fantastically. It's the Premier League.

"They have very good players and are strong tactically. They deserved to win. We must analyse the match and keep going."

It was a good weekend for Arsenal, the only one of the top three to secure a point following their 0-0 draw with Nottingham Forest.

None of the top six teams heading into the weekend managed a win, and none of the bottom five were beaten.

"It was amazing, we worked so hard against a very good team. The lads ground it out today, we got the chance and we took it," said Everton midfielder James Garner. "We tried to block off the passing lanes and stop them playing through the middle, forcing them wide."

They were denied the opener from the kick-off when a long ball from goalkeeper Jordan Pickford was met by Merlin Rohl and fired goalwards but struck the post after 11 seconds.

It was the quickest any team had hit the woodwork in a Premier League fixture since records were first kept in the 2006/07 season.

Villa also struck the woodwork just before halftime as Youri Tielemans deep cross was met by Evann Guessand, whose looping header came back off the crossbar.—Reuters

Fullkrug heads winner as Milan edge Lecce at home

MILAN: A profligate AC Milan secured a hard-fought 1-0 home win over Lecce on Sunday, with Niclas Fullkrug heading in a late winner to ensure they kept pace in the Serie A title race.

Milan are second in the table with 46 points, three behind city rivals Inter Milan at the summit.

Milan found it hard to break through in the first half, probing patiently without reward, and saw an early effort from Rafael Leao ruled out for offside.

The pressure from Milan continued after the break, but Lecce goalkeeper Wladimiro Falcone stood firm, producing a string of outstanding saves, including one stop to deny Christian Pulisic that left the US forward stunned.

The breakthrough finally came in the 76th minute, when Alexis Saelemaekers lifted a delicate ball back from the byline that was met by Fullkrug, who made no mistake with a close-range header for his first goal for the club.

"I got an incredible assist for Ale and yeah, it's the dream of a striker to get an assist like this," said Fullkrug to DAZN.

"I'm very thankful and very grateful to be here to wear the shirt, to get the trust you also need as a striker... It's a very good group, great atmosphere, and that's why I'm 100 per cent happy."

Fullkrug suffered a broken toe soon after moving to northern Italy and local media widely report that thieves stole half a million euros worth of watches and jewelry from his hotel room while he was away for Milan's midweek win at Como.

Asked by DAZN if his goal made up for his recent misfortune, Fullkrug smiled and said: "Yeah, it's enough."

Milan's next opponents AS Roma comfortably won 2-0 at Torino thanks to a star performance from Paulo Dybala, who laid on new arrival Donyell Malen for a classy close-range finish midway through the first half before ensuring a third straight win in the 72nd minute.

The Argentina international's brilliantly guided finish from Devyne Rensch's cross was his first goal in nearly three months and helped put fourth-placed Roma on 42 points, four behind Milan.

Dybala has had a difficult first campaign under Gian Piero Gasperini with familiar injury problems and the rise of countryman Matias Soule suggesting his time might be up in the Italian capital.

But the 32-year-old was excellent in a win which was revenge for being eliminated from the Italian Cup by Torino on Tuesday night, and moved Roma three points ahead of fifth-placed Juventus in the battle for Champions League football.

"Dybala put in a really good performance today, our first goal was fantastic. You can see that he and Malen understand each other on the pitch," said Gasperini.—Agencies

Asif storms into national snooker semis

KARACHI: Mohammad Asif dethroned defending champion Shahid Aftab in a last-16 thriller before powering into the semi-finals on a day of high drama that saw the title race blown wide open at the National Snooker Championship here at the NBP Sports Complex on Monday.

The three-time world champion Asif first staged a brilliant comeback to oust the title-holder Shahid 5-4 in a nail-biting prequarter-final. Trailing 4-2, Asif won three consecutive frames, sealing the decider with a match-clinching 66 break.

Carrying that momentum into the evening session, Asif then dispatched second seed Mohammad Sajjad 5-2 in the quarter-finals. After trading the opening frames, Asif took control, crafting a decisive 106 break in the fifth frame to secure his semi-final berth.

Joining him in the final four is former national champion Asjad Iqbal, who produced the most dominant performance of the day.

After a straightforward 5-1 last-16 win, Asjad whitewashed 2022 world champion Ahsan Ramzan 5-0 in a stunning quarter-final display, never allowing his young opponent a foothold.

The other semi-final will see Rana Irfan take on Mubashir Raza.

Irfan survived a brutal battle, edging out Awaisullah Munir 5-4 in a quarter-final where the 2024 Asian six-red champion Awaisullah fired a 101 break in vain.

Earlier, Mubashir ended the run of young prodigy Hasnain Akhtar 5-3, rallying with a 101 break of his own after dropping the first frame.

The day claimed other top seeds. Besides Shahid and Ahsan, sixth seed Sohail Shehzad and eighth seed A. Sattar also fell in the prequarter-finals.

Asjad faces Irfan in the first semi-final on Tuesday , followed by the clash between the resurgent Asif and Mubashir.—Sports Reporter

Sadruddin re-elected as KRC president

By Anwar Zuberi

KARACHI: Syed Sadruddin Shah was unanimously re-elected as president of the Karachi Race Club (KRC) for a three-year term (2026-28) during the managing committee meeting held in Karachi the other day.

Sadruddin has been at the helm of affairs since 2008. Senior steward Irfan Mehdi was elevated to the position of chairman as Tajamul Hussain Mirza has stepped down due to health reasons.

Muhammad Kashif Khan has been inducted into the managing committee for the first time.

Meanwhile, Sohail Ahmed, the winner of the Quaid-e-Azam Gold Cup, was crowned as champion rider of 2025 year with 18 wins under his belt.

Veteran trainer Mohyuddin clinched the champion trainer award by partnering 28 winners while the champion owner award went to Haji Abdul Majeed.

The 10-member managing committee: Syed Sadruddin Shah (president), Irfan Mehdi (chairman), Syed Ismail Shah, Shamsuddin Rajar, Dr. Farhan Essa, Murtaza Raza Hussain, Syed Munawar Ali, Nand Kumar Goklani, Gul Muhammad Rajar, Muhammad Kashif Khan.